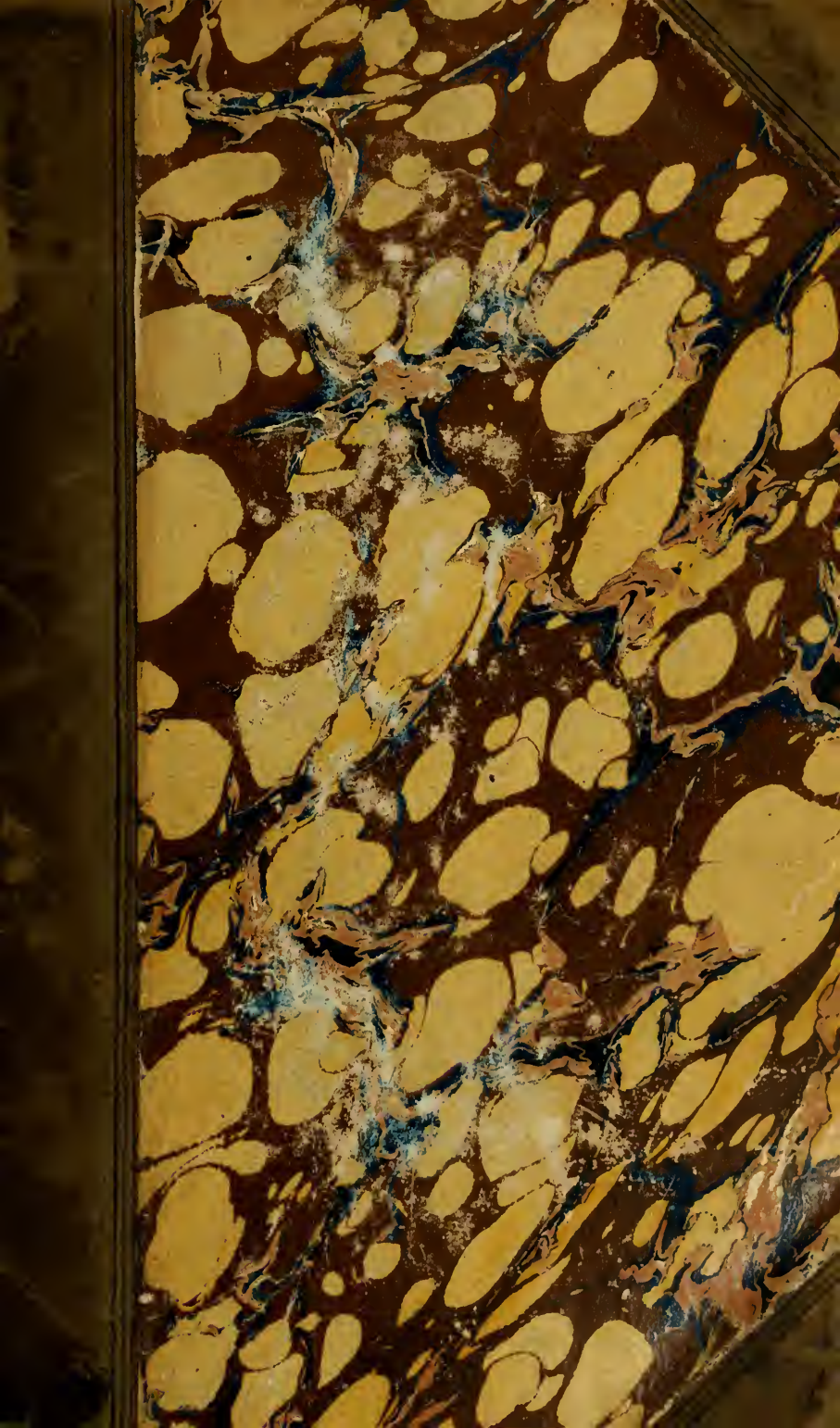

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Fellowship in Joy and Sorrow.

A SERMON

PREACHED IN

HER MAJESTY'S ROYAL CHAPEL
IN WINDSOR CASTLE,

ON THE

SUNDAY PRECEDING THE MARRIAGE

OF

H. R. H. THE PRINCE OF WALES,

MARCH 8, 1863.

BY

SAMUEL, LORD BISHOP OF OXFORD,

LORD HIGH ALMONER TO THE QUEEN;
CHANCELLOR OF THE MOST NOBLE ORDER OF THE GARTER.

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ROMANS xii. 15.

"Rejoice with them that do rejoice; and weep with them that weep."

BY no other token does Holy Scripture more manifest itself to the conscience to be the Book of God than by that profound knowledge of humanity which makes it the book of Man.

In this brief exhortation there is a striking instance of this knowledge. To a mere superficial glance, indeed, there is something strange in the counsel. Why should it be necessary to urge the redeemed of Christ "to rejoice with them that do rejoice?" Are not men *naturally* prone to sun themselves, when they can, in the prosperity of the fortunate; to share the laughter of the merry-hearted; and the songs and rejoicings of the house of feasting? Surely it did not need a special precept from Heaven to enforce as a duty that which human nature is so ready to choose as a pleasure. Here is one surface difficulty.

Again it may be asked, why join together the two parts of this precept — "Rejoice with them that do rejoice; *and* weep with them that weep?" as though there were some special connection be-

tween the two: whereas it seems at first sight as if they altogether differed. For it appears natural to us to look for fellowship in joy to one man, and for fellowship in sorrow to another: to make the successful, the untroubled, the high-spirited the companions of our gladness, and the chastened and afflicted the sharers of our griefs. Here, then, is a second surface difficulty. Now it is to the solution of these difficulties that I would call your attention; both because it will shew us something of that deep knowledge of humanity which pervades the Bible, and also because it will suggest to us some practical thoughts of great value in themselves, as well as of special application to our present circumstances.

And first, for this uniting together in one precept the fellowship in sorrow and in joy.

Now, startling as this may look at first sight, how deeply human is it when we gaze into it more closely. For first, how are these blended always in this world! Where can we ever find the one without the other? Where is the house of feasting in which there are not in some lone chamber or other the bitter herbs and the unleavened bread? Where is the blessed sunshine without the dark neighbourhood of some weeping cloud? Even if they seem in any life to be for awhile parted, how inevitable is the union! The sparkling cup of joy is followed evermore in sad succession by the cup of tears; and it comes surely round to each one in his appointed turn. Where is the rich inheritance of earthly

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love, without sooner or later the deep anguish of separation? Where does not the brightness of the festal dance change, even as it is lengthened out, into the slow procession of the veiled mourners?

Nor is this all. Even beyond it, there seems to be in us ourselves, as we are here on earth, a hidden sacramental union between joy and sorrow, even at the same time in the same heart. This may not indeed be perceived in the frivolous, who weep childish tears which dry as soon as they are shed, and laugh with an idle surface merriment in which the soul scarcely seems to join. But it is plainly marked in the working of deeper spirits. In them these highest fountain-heads of emotion lie close beside each other. In them great joy is a very solemn strain, and often finds its truest utterance in a sigh; it is a trembling mystery, which declares itself outwardly rather by the welling over of the tear of delight than by the shallower acts of a noisy laughter. In them, if God has given to them the grace to yield themselves to His Will and to lie passive in His hands, a deep abiding grief is, not unfrequently, the best possession which life as it advances has left to them; for like the aroma which is shed around from the crushed leaf of the spice plant, with the bruising of their heart is mingled evermore in the stillness of their resignation the fragrance of undying recollections and the sweet breath of expectant hopes.

Surely in all this we are "fearfully and wonderfully made," and we can see that He who joined

together this twofold precept had as He spake it His finger on the true pulse of our inmost life, and was reading all its mystery.

But even thus we have not said all. For to enter thoroughly into the reasons for this double precept we should see further, exactly (1.) what it is to which we are exhorted, (2.) why the exhortation is needed, and (3.) with what purpose it is given.

Now these we shall mark the most readily if we examine them, first, as to the second exhortation, that we "weep with them that weep." What, then, (1.) is it to do this?

It is not, merely, like the ten lepers, whom a common misery had drawn into companionship, that we let our sorrows lead us into the company of the afflicted—that we bring, as it were, our own grief into the common stock, and mourn in company with other mourners for our own woe; but that we, by a willing stooping to their burdens, mourn with other mourners, not for our own sorrows, but for theirs; that, in the true meaning of that most expressive word, we sympathise with them — stand down beside them from our own height of health, or mirth, or abundance of love, in their low estate of sickness, sadness, or bereavement. *This* is the meaning of the exhortation "Weep *with* them that weep."

And (2.) the reason why we need such a command is plain enough. The natural selfishness of our hearts always tends to make us hard to others. 'We have griefs enough of our own' is its secret

whisper; 'why should we add theirs to our burden?' 'We have few moments enough for pleasure and enjoyment, why should we make them fewer by thus permitting the intrusion of other men's troubles?'

This is the natural working of our fallen hearts: and where selfishness has grown to be the law of the life, it has even wrought so madly, that we read of an Eastern tyrant who, in his miserable desire to drive away every possible cloud which could dim his own sunshine, punished with death any one who appeared in his presence with those signs of mourning which might haply remind him of the possible advance against himself of some unknown calamity. Now, though it be not so frantic in its demonstration, yet all selfishness is of the same family with this. The common "passing by" of the sufferer "on the other side," the irritation and fretfulness which the recurring presence of another's grief is too apt to provoke in many tempers,—all this is of the same type, and less only in degree.

Now as all this is the degrading working of our own selfishness,—of that law of corruption which would, if it prevailed, narrow and bind in our souls as in bars of iron, and so thoroughly debase us,—we may see (3.) the purpose of the exhortation. It is a call to each one of us to rouse ourselves from this degradation; to open our hearts to others; to weep with them that weep, that our eyes may be purged by such tears,

and our hearts made larger, truer, and tenderer by such actings of sympathy.

And now I think we may see why the Word of God calls us to rejoice with them that rejoice; for here, again, what we are bidden to do is not to seek for the materials of our own selfish gratification in other men's successes, and of our own pleasure in their rejoicing. It needed no precept of Holy Scripture to teach us *that*. But what it does bid us do, is to go out of ourselves; to set ourselves aside; to rejoice in *their* joy; to joy *with them;* to be a true heart's brother to them; to be glad because they are happy; to find the air pleasant, not because some breath of the fragrance of their incense reaches us, but because its sweet cloud wraps them round. This, then, is the meaning of the exhortation, "Rejoice with them that do rejoice;" and, alas! *it* is not natural to us. We see everywhere that it is strange to fallen man; that the mind needs to be disciplined and trained before it attains freely to it. And the more full of all the means of comfort and instruments of joy is any man's portion, so much the more difficult is it for him thus to enter really into the feelings of others. Such an one has the greatest need of being met with that caution which was addressed by God to the king of Israel of old, that he watch "lest his heart be lifted up above his brethren."

For the real hindrance to our *thus* rejoicing with the joyful is that which we saw hindered us weeping with the sorrowful. It is still the selfishness

of our natural hearts; their denial of brotherhood. What are the joys of others to us? If we have our own joys, why should we turn from them to the far less exciting pleasures of others? Or, if we are in trouble, why must our sadness be made the sadder by their mirth? why must we have songs sung to our heavy hearts? Oh! miserable utterance of a contracted soul! There is no sadder spectacle than the peevishness stirred up in a thoroughly selfish heart by the sight of great happiness in others; there is no more blessed sight than that of the wounded spirit which is able to rejoice thoroughly in the joy of another, which it well knows is no more for it on earth. So that here, again, we trace the same deep knowledge of our nature in this precept; and we may find, too, in its purpose the same merciful provision for our restoration.

For until this lesson is learned our hearts are not made thoroughly human, and so fit for that blessed company with perfected humanity in the Person of our blessed Lord Himself, and in those whom He has delivered, which is placed as a bright future before the redeemed of Christ. There is still a flaw somewhere in such, or their hearts too would ring clear; there is something still untuneable within them, and therefore their spirits answer not as yet perfectly to the note which vibrates past them.

If, then, we ask how we are to gain this blessed restoration of our nature, surely the first answer is

that, depending upon God's help, we must in earnest set ourselves to fulfil in act this double precept. For they who do seek to fulfil it will have the secret aid of God's blessed Spirit working with them, moulding their wills and elevating their affections: and then all outward things will become to them a healing and an ennobling discipline. The commonest incidents of their daily life will be so. The little trials which meet them in the family from the sorrows and joys, nay, even from the waywardness and infirmities of those with whom they live, will all help to educate more perfectly their own spirits. In throwing themselves freely into the interests of others; in bearing with them; in feeling for them; in little denials of themselves; in secret sacrifices of their own will for others, they will meet with all they need under the help of God's grace to attemper and attune their own hearts. And as these common things, so yet more markedly will the great turns of life work for them this blessed end. Times of joy will tend to soften and purify the heart, if instead of luxuriously concentrating their sweetness for our private delight, we generously strive to impart to others as we receive ourselves, and to make them partakers of our blessings. True love shoots up in the heart at these seasons of great joy, if only they are so used, with a prodigality of growth, even as the tropical earth pours forth its richest abundance of fertility in the glad times of "clear shining after rain." There will be the like discipline in times of sorrow.

Every sort of sorrow will work in its own way this good end. Disappointments, vexations, pains of body, weakness, weariness, all these, instead of breeding, as they do in the selfish, the low fever of fretfulness, deepen and soften the heart which takes them meekly from God's hand and yields to them as to the chastenings of a Father's love. But most especially is this the fruit of those great sorrows which wait upon the parting of the dearest to us from the active ministries of our love: for we may think of them as having passed through the great change, as being now altogether human; as being free from all remaining imperfections of selfishness, and yet as being indeed near to us, as waiting for the manifested meeting; and so the thought of them in our sadness stirs us up to emulate them in their deliverance, to aspire to their perfection, and to antedate here in perpetual anticipation the blessedness of the coming reunion.

Thus does every day as it passes minister as well in its commonest incidents as in its great joys or its heavier trials, to those who will strive so to use them, the means of their enfranchisement; and the enlarging spirit learns, through the discipline of weeping with them that weep, how to practise that which hereafter shall be all its exercise, "to rejoice with them that do rejoice."

Finally, in one way more may we each one set ourselves to learn and to practise this ennobling lesson. Beside each one of us here, unseen but most truly present, is He our only Lord, in Whom

alone of those born of woman was our humanity from the first altogether perfect. Being God as truly as He is Man, He is all-present everywhere, and so in very deed is present with each one of us: being still Man as truly as He is God, He can enter with a brother's heart, unflawed and perfect, into every joy and sorrow of the life in us which He has redeemed with His precious Blood. And as in Him humanity is thus perfect, there is in Him the capacity for perfect sympathy with all. No note can be struck in any heart the true counterpart of which is not in Him; and so as perfect Man He has within Himself the inexhaustible resources of an all-sufficing sympathy. It is from Him, above all, that we must learn sympathy; it is in close companionship with Him that our nature must be renewed. This mysterious communing, this hidden companionship, above all then let us seek: bidding Him to all our times of joy, in all our sorrows leaning upon Him. For to what is there that we may not bid Him; what burden is there that we may not rest upon Him? Ere now He has been bidden to the marriage feast and come with gladness to heighten its joys. And still He will come if He is bidden: come with that cheering, elevating, ennobling, purifying Presence, which shall turn the water of the earth into the wine of the kingdom; which shall make fleeting joys endure; yea, which shall keep the best till last, and transform the silver links of earthly love into the fine gold of the enduring betrothal and

the everlasting Presence. Oh! that even now amongst us He may be indeed thus bidden; that THEY whose lives His blessing is now blending into one, may bow themselves to receive it; that none of the signs or instruments of outward greatness may hide from them His Presence; that the sweetest voices of earthly affection may not shut out the sound of His voice; that for their sakes, and the sake of this great people, it may be mystically fulfilled amongst us, "And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee . . . and Jesus was called unto the marriage."

And as it is in our joys, so is it also in our griefs. Still, if we bid Him, will He be with us in our sorrows; weeping as He wept once with the sisters of Lazarus; whispering again to true-hearted mourners, "Thy brother shall rise again, for I am the Resurrection and the Life;" saying, as of old to the wondering heart of its best beloved, "He is not dead but sleepeth." For to Him all live; around Him are the living; in the body or out of the body it matters not: He is the God, not of the dead, but of the living; and with Him we are with them. Oh! fruitful, comforting, ennobling companionship; full of present consolation; heightening every joy; transfiguring every emotion; purifying the soul which seeks after it, and fitting it indeed in the coming dawn, when all tears shall have been wiped from off all faces and there shall be no weeper with whom to weep, for ever and for evermore to REJOICE WITH THEM THAT DO REJOICE.